
Stalin and the Prospects of a Separate Peace in World War II

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THE FEAR THAT Moscow and Berlin might again come to terms preoccupied American and British statesmen long after Hitler had forced the unwilling Stalin to join the Allied coalition. In the opinion of George F. Kennan, a touchstone for appraising the wartime policies of the Americans and the British "will be found . . . in the soundness and accuracy of their fears with relation to the possibility of a separate German-Soviet peace."¹ The possibility never materialized; but does that mean a Russian-German rapprochement was merely an empty threat? This is indeed an important question, for the answer may influence the appraisal of both the Soviet war aims and the Western responses to them—two central themes in the current debate about the origins of the cold war.

If Stalin contemplated a separate peace at any particular moment during the war, his objectives must have been more flexible than they appear in retrospect. Any compromise with Germany would inevitably have given him considerably less territory and influence than he achieved in 1945. But was there ever a favorable situation for a compromise? And even if there was, would the Russians have discussed peace with Hitler, or would they have required his replacement by a non-Nazi government first? In either case, how much did the prospect of an armistice on the eastern front influence the policies of the Western allies? Was not Stalin himself creating a false alarm in order to exact concessions from his coalition partners?

These intriguing questions have so far received surprisingly little scholarly attention. The late Herbert Feis, for example, all but ignored them in his history of the Great Alliance.² William H. McNeill has confined his opinion to a few cautious remarks.³ In the 1950s John A. Lukacs was the only one to come to grips with the problem as far as his limited evidence then

¹ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston, 1961), 362–63.

² Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, 1967), 143.

³ William H. McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-Operation and Conflict* (London, 1953), 275, 324.

allowed; he concluded that Moscow had considered the alternative of a separate peace seriously.⁴ A few other authors have subsequently written about it, but none has done so within the broad context the subject deserves.⁵ The shortage of reliable evidence has been the principal obstacle for historians. All their inquiries have so far depended almost exclusively upon the testimony of Peter Kleist, the less than reputable former aide of the Nazi foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. In his postwar memoirs Kleist maintained that during the war he had received several Soviet peace feelers in Stockholm.⁶ German authors have been somewhat more inclined to take his word than have their foreign colleagues but have done little to substantiate their judgment.⁷ It is to be regretted that the conclusive evidence from the Moscow archives may not be available for some time to come. In the meantime, however, more than has previously been known can be deduced from additional sources accessible in the West. Unpublished records of the United States Department of State and Department of the Army—particularly the military intelligence papers—captured German documents, and little-known publications from Eastern Europe are among the sources used in this essay for the first time.⁸

From the Soviet point of view a peace with Berlin would have necessarily meant two very different things before and after Stalingrad. During the period of German ascendancy it could only have entailed strategic surrender—"the orderly capitulation of the remaining forces" in order to prevent the worse consequences of a defeat.⁹ After Stalingrad had reversed military fortunes a genuine compromise was theoretically possible. Accordingly peace prospects during the periods preceding and following that crucial turning point of the war ought to be considered separately.

No sooner did Hitler and Stalin begin to fight than they were suspected of seeking a settlement. The United States assistant secretary of state, Adolf A. Berle, Jr., for example, considered their rapprochement possible as early as July 1941; the British Embassy in Moscow expected a Soviet bid for peace

⁴ John A. Lukacs, *The Great Powers and Eastern Europe* (New York, 1953), 502-24.

⁵ See, for example, Karl-Heinz Minuth, "Sowjetisch-deutsche Friedenskontakte," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 16 (1965): 38-45.

⁶ The English translation, entitled *The European Tragedy* (London, 1965), is an expanded version of the original edition of Peter Kleist, *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin, 1939-1945* (Bonn, 1950).

⁷ For example, Lothar Gruchmann, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg: Kriegführung und Politik* (Munich, 1967), 242-43; and Boris Meissner, *Russland, die Westmächte und Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1954), 13-17.

⁸ The following archival sources will be cited throughout this essay: Records of the Office of Strategic Services, record group 226, National Archives, Washington (hereafter OSS); Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs—Military Intelligence (G-2), record group 165, Washington National Record Center (hereafter G-2); General Records of the Department of State, record group 59, National Archives (hereafter DS); Records of the German foreign office (Auswärtiges Amt), microcopy T-120, National Archives (hereafter AA); Records of the British Foreign Office, General Correspondence, FO 371, Public Record Office, London (hereafter FO); and Records of the British War Cabinet, Memoranda, CAB 66, Public Record Office, (hereafter CAB).

⁹ Paul Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat* (New York, 1964), v.

two months later.¹⁰ In early 1942 London was especially apprehensive about the chances of a sudden armistice.¹¹ Lord Halifax, the ambassador to Washington, repeatedly expressed his concern in private conversations.¹² For reasons inherent in the Soviet system, a peace initiative from Moscow was not out of the question. The Bolsheviks had proved before that the ideological antagonism between nazism and communism did not necessarily rule out collaboration. And the Russian government was under no obligation to its constituents to maintain the alliance with the West. The autocrat, who had all decisions about war and peace in his hands, could enforce his will easily, regardless of public opinion, if he chose to do so. Extensive freedom from domestic restraints was but one of the many affinities between Stalin and Hitler—the two dictators who hated but respected each other. Of the two, it was Stalin rather than Hitler who tended to underestimate the incompatibility of their respective interests. Stalin personally had a greater share than Hitler in bringing to conclusion the pact of August 1939, had benefited from it more than his Nazi counterpart, and had therefore tried to preserve it until the very last moment.

As a matter of fact, Soviet spokesmen expressed nostalgia for a *modus vivendi* with Berlin even after the Nazis had already violated it. On June 24, 1941, for example, the emigré leadership of the German Communist party in Moscow issued a statement in favor of an “indestructible alliance” between the German and Russian peoples.¹³ Two days later Walter Ulbricht, that particularly faithful interpreter of Stalin’s thoughts, drafted an appeal to Hitler’s soldiers in which Ulbricht drew a sharp distinction between their unjustified attack on the “Fatherland of Socialism” and their struggle against the Western “plutocracies.”¹⁴ Although such explicit statements soon ceased, they nevertheless suggest that Stalin would have regarded a renewed understanding with Germany as both feasible and desirable. From his point of view an arrangement with the congenial Nazi dictator could still have been easier than dealing with the Western statesmen whose thinking was so alien to his own and who were particularly reluctant to grant him title to the territories he had seized in 1939 and 1940.

In early 1942 the British government was actually quite tempted to endorse Stalin’s territorial claims in Eastern Europe in order to avert his

¹⁰ Adolf A. Berle, Jr. to J. Edgar Hoover, July 10, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1941, 1: General, *The Soviet Union* (Washington, 1958), 789–90; Sumner Welles, “Two Roosevelt Decisions: One Debit, One Credit,” *Foreign Affairs*, 29 (1950–51): 189.

¹¹ Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, 2 (London, 1971): 239, 244.

¹² S[umner] W[elles], memorandum on conversation with Lord Halifax, Mar. 30, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, 3: *Europe* (Washington, 1961), 537. See also Jan Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory* (New York, 1947), 109.

¹³ Statement printed in the journal *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* (1941), no. 6–7, quoted in report no. 44338 C, OSS.

¹⁴ Walter Ulbricht, “Entwurf eines Aufrufes an die deutschen Soldaten,” June 26, 1941, in his *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, 2: (1933–1946), supp. 2 (Berlin, 1968): 221.

possible defection. Churchill explained the reasons to Roosevelt in unequivocal terms: "The increasing gravity of the war has led me to feel that the principles of the Atlantic Charter ought not to be construed so as to deny Russia the frontiers she occupied when Germany attacked her."¹⁵ But Washington objected on both moral and practical grounds and insisted that any reference to the controversial frontiers be deleted from the final text of the British-Soviet treaty, which was signed on May 26, 1942.¹⁶ The Americans were loath to bestow an air of legitimacy upon the annexations that Stalin had carried out in a particularly scandalous fashion during his collusion with Hitler. In addition they were trying to avoid the Wilsonian predicament by abstaining from any commitments that might prove embarrassing after the war.

The policy of refusing to abet Stalin's misdeeds had unquestionable virtues, but the promotion of his faith in the alliance was not one of them. On December 6, 1941, the Soviet leader told the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, "If our war aims were different, then there would be no alliance."¹⁷ Rightly or wrongly Stalin considered the "second front" the supreme proof of cooperation,¹⁸ and in his mind its absence could even have cast an altogether sinister light upon the extensive material aid he was getting. Were the Western capitalists not sending him just enough to promote a military stalemate in order to benefit later from the mutual exhaustion of both belligerents? Such a putative scheme must have seemed especially plausible to Stalin, since he himself had thought along these lines in 1939-41, as the shifting emphases of the Comintern's statements at that time indicate.¹⁹ And it should be remembered that the Russians, in conformity with Marxist doctrine as they understood it, vastly exaggerated the influence that British aristocrats and American financiers who were hostile to the Soviet Union were able to exercise upon the policies of their respective governments.

In this context it matters little that political considerations did not in fact cause the repeated postponements of the landing on the Continent;²⁰ in all fairness some Western actions could have hardly failed to create an impression of duplicity. The Russians were perhaps understandably disturbed about the inability of the British to give a convincing explanation of the awkward peace mission of Rudolf Hess—admittedly a difficult thing to do—and about the unwillingness of the London government to bring the

¹⁵ Churchill to Roosevelt, Mar. 7, 1942, in Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (London, 1951), 293.

¹⁶ See the treaty in Louise W. Holborn, ed., *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations*, 1 (Boston, 1943): 235-37.

¹⁷ Stalin, quoted in Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2: 223.

¹⁸ The official Soviet view is summarized in V. M. Kulish, *Vtoroi front* (The Second Front) (Moscow, 1960), 16-20.

¹⁹ The Comintern's statements are analyzed in Kurt Krupinski, *Die Komintern seit Kriegs-ausbruch* (Berlin, 1941).

²⁰ Evidence that it was not political considerations that postponed the Allied landings appears in Maurice Matloff and Edwin S. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, 1953), 217-32, 322-27.

self-appointed intermediary to trial.²¹ Even more disconcerting was Roosevelt's unfulfilled promise to launch the invasion of Europe before 1943, a promise he had let Molotov believe was definite.²² Then, too, no matter how genuine the president's desire to promote mutual trust, his volubility may have had the very opposite effect on Soviet minds ever disposed to suspect the worst.²³

Thus Stalin had reasons, albeit the wrong ones, to question the motives of his allies in 1942. Yet these alone did not necessarily prompt him to desert them. Very soon after June 1941 the Nazis proved by their behavior that so long as they retained the upper hand the only peace terms the Soviet Union could expect would be complete submission. Russia's sole alternative was to fight on, and any signs of faltering resolve would have, if anything, given further encouragement to the enemy; or even worse, they might make the dreaded Western reversal of alliances a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stalin could have been exasperated with the coalition, but he had to maintain it. On balance, therefore, any Russian efforts to come to terms with Germany before Stalingrad may be dismissed as mere products of anxious imagination.

DURING THE WINTER of 1942-43 the situation changed radically. Having compelled the Nazis to retreat from the Caucasus, the Red Army encircled German forces at Stalingrad on November 23, 1942, and annihilated them by February 1, 1943. The power of the two belligerents now seemed to be almost balanced—a condition that E. A. Boltin, a leading Soviet military historian, believes lasted until mid-1943.²⁴ But although Moscow's military prospects brightened, a complete defeat of the enemy was still in the distant future, especially as long as the second front remained uncertain. Past combat experience gave every reason to believe that the path of victory would be arduous, and the Russians had already suffered appalling losses. Yet the military situation after Stalingrad offered the Soviet Union, for the first time since the beginning of the war, both the opportunity and the inducement to trade military assets for a political compromise. Soviet leaders, well versed in the Marxist notions about the interaction of war and politics, could have hardly missed that message. And indeed, an authoritative article published in January 1943 in the party journal *Bolshevik* indicated that they did not. Its author was none other than Colonel E. Razin, whom Stalin had chosen on other occasions as mouthpiece for his own views about military questions. The colonel affirmed that "separation of politics and strategy, and the neglect of the requirements of politics for 'purely stra-

²¹ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2: 278-80.

²² Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 64-69.

²³ See Robert H. McNeal, "Roosevelt through Stalin's Spectacles," *International Journal*, 18 (1962-63): 194-206.

²⁴ E. A. Boltin, "Die Wesenszüge der sowjetischen Strategie in der Endphase des Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges," in Bernhard Weissel, ed., *Befreiung und Neubeginn* (Berlin, 1968), 65.

tegic' reasons are fraught with dangerous consequences. . . . Politics and war influence each other but they are not factors of the same order; primacy always belongs to politics."²⁵

The obstacles to a negotiated settlement between the Soviet Union and Germany had diminished by early 1943. Although the passions aroused during the savage struggle ruled out genuine reconciliation, the enormous exertion of both belligerents was conducive to comparing the assets of imperfect peace with the liabilities of elusive victory. Aware of the opportunities, prospective mediators were readily available. Japanese diplomats repeatedly tendered their good services.²⁶ Mussolini, himself in danger of an imminent invasion by the Western Allies, implored Hitler to seek peace with the Russians.²⁷ Among the neutral countries Sweden offered a particularly convenient ambiance for preliminaries. Stockholm, easily accessible from both Moscow and Berlin, was a capital where the members of the opposing coalitions maintained extensive diplomatic and intelligence staffs.

The Soviet legation in Stockholm was headed by the colorful figure of Alexandra M. Kollontay—the aristocratic daughter of a tsarist general, a veteran Bolshevik intellectual of nonconformist leanings, and in her younger days the prophet and practitioner of unconventional views on love, sex, and family.²⁸ In fact these views, rather than diplomatic skill, had qualified her for the foreign service in the early years after the Revolution, when the Bolsheviks delighted in actions *pour épater les bourgeois*. Kollontay was given to emotions in politics and did not hide her Germanophobia even during the period of the official friendship from 1939 to 1941. By 1943 she had reached the age of seventy and was suffering from a heart ailment that confined her to a sanitarium away from the Swedish capital for most of the year. For a historian searching for clues of a Russian-German rapprochement, Kollontay is a great disappointment—a less effective envoy at the sensitive Stockholm post can hardly be imagined. But Stalin's highest-ranking diplomats seldom performed the most important missions. In Sweden, too, officials less colorful but more professional than Kollontay actually ran the legation. Among them was counselor Vladimir S. Semyonov, a specialist in German affairs, whose later career included such elevated functions as chief political adviser of the military government in occupied Germany and eventually deputy foreign minister. Another important official in Stockholm was Boris Yartsev, an expert on Finland, who is on record for having extended peace feelers from Stockholm to Helsinki in

²⁵ E. Razin, "Lenin o sushchnosti voiny" (Lenin on the Nature of War), *Bolshevik*, 19 (1943): no. 1, p. 47.

²⁶ Karl Ott to German foreign office, Mar. 3, 1942; AA, microfilm 39, frames 32999–33002; note on conversation between Ushida and German confidant, Oct. 10, 1942, *ibid.*, frames 33417–18.

²⁷ See F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship* (New York, 1962), 84–88, 93–94, 102–03.

²⁸ There is a brief, semiofficial biography of Alexandra M. Kollontay by Anna M. Itkina, *Revoliutsioner, Tribun, Diplomat* (Revolutionary, Tribune, Diplomat) (Moscow, 1964), and a sentimental account by Kollontay's friend, Isabel de Palencia, *Alexandra Kollontay: Ambassador from Russia* (New York, 1947).

late 1942.²⁹ Both Semyonov and Yartsev supposedly maintained a very close relationship with Stalin's security chief, Lavrenti P. Beria, who was known as an advocate of partnership with Germany.³⁰

The German personnel in Stockholm were of equally high caliber, and their selection could be interpreted as a sign of Berlin's interest in a diplomatic settlement of the war. The envoy to Sweden was Hans Thomsen, who had last served as chargé d'affaires in Washington. In addition to Thomsen, in early 1943 Ribbentrop dispatched several respectable diplomats of conservative leanings to other important neutral capitals such as Madrid and Tokyo.³¹ The German foreign minister took pride in having achieved the understanding with the Russians in 1939, and, if his postwar statements are to be trusted, he would have liked to see its renewal in 1943.³² The propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, was another prominent Nazi favorably disposed to a settlement with Moscow.³³

Thriving on excitement and lucrative connections, volunteers of sometimes dubious character were at hand in wartime Sweden to facilitate liaison with friend and foe. One such individual was a certain Edgar Clauss, a nondescript businessman of Baltic-German ancestry and a temporary resident of Stockholm's Carlton Hotel. He was accompanied by a Swedish lady whom he promised to marry after his allegedly forthcoming but in fact fictitious appointment as German minister in Stockholm. Local Germans thought that he was "either a braggart or a spy," and they warned Thomsen about him.³⁴ As a matter of fact, Clauss was both. Any further inquiry into Clauss by the German legation ceased after German intelligence authorities affirmed that Clauss's activities, which were not specified, served the interests of the Reich.³⁵ But Clauss had evidently more than one iron in the fire. He is the key person in the memoirs of Peter Kleist, who used to travel frequently between Berlin and Stockholm during the war. According to Kleist it was Clauss who told him, on December 14, 1942, that the Russians wanted a separate peace. Alluding to information from the Soviet legation, Clauss said that Moscow was ready to sign an armistice in eight days if only Berlin would respond favorably.³⁶ Although the accuracy of

²⁹ Note on conversation between Ernst von Weizsäcker and Finnish minister to Berlin, Nov. 11, 1942, AA, microfilm 39, frame 33442.

³⁰ Meissner, *Russland, die Westmächte und Deutschland*, 14; James E. McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, 2 (New York, 1970): 17.

³¹ Maxime Mourin, *Les tentatives de paix dans la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Paris, 1949), 144-45.

³² Joachim von Ribbentrop, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs*, tr. O. Watson (London, 1954), 170.

³³ Wilfred von Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende* (Buenos Aires, 1949), 97-98, 157-59; see also n. 80.

³⁴ Schönwald to German consulate in Stockholm, Mar. 23, 1942, AA, microfilm 719, frames 318871-72.

³⁵ Referred to in Wied, German legation in Stockholm, to German foreign office, May 6, 1942, *ibid.*, frames 318869-70; and Kramarz, German foreign office, to German legation in Stockholm, June 12, 1942, *ibid.*, microfilm 1801, frame E 034410.

³⁶ Kleist, *European Tragedy*, 139-41.

this assertion has not been verified, other Soviet actions at that time give it weight.

On November 6, 1942, shortly before the Red Army encircled the Germans at Stalingrad, Stalin declared in a public speech that "it is not our aim to destroy all organized military force in Germany, for every literate person will understand that this is not only impossible . . . but . . . also inexpedient from the point of view of the victor."³⁷ Stalin had already, on February 23, 1942, publicly refused "to identify Hitler's clique with the German people," suggesting "that Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the German state remain."³⁸ But now he was more specific than ever before in offering friendship to the German military, the caste from which had been recruited so many prominent Russophiles in the past. Following the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922, the German military had been the chief instigators of the deals behind the scenes that enabled them to bypass the restrictions of Versailles by secretly rearming in Russian territory and enabled the Soviet Union in return to obtain German technical assistance. In 1943 the German military were more likely than other Germans to perceive that Hitler's war was lost and to seek salvation in an understanding with Moscow in the spirit of Rapallo.

Shortly after Stalin's address of November 1942 the pattern of Moscow's daily propaganda directed at Germany changed. Until late 1942 the Soviet-sponsored "German People's Radio" had urged in crude Marxist terms that the oppressed German masses intensify the class struggle against their Fascist-capitalist masters.³⁹ By January 1943 a more sophisticated theme had been introduced. The broadcasts began to report a powerful peace movement among Germans regardless of class and political conviction.⁴⁰ On December 6, 1942, a clandestine conference of these Germans for peace was supposed to have met in the Rhineland, and early the following year its proceedings appeared in print in Moscow.⁴¹ Included were speeches by anonymous delegates ranging from Social Democrats to "Christians," organized labor to entrepreneurs, Communists to disillusioned ex-Nazis. But except for sources of Soviet origin, there is no evidence that the meeting ever took place;⁴² in that sense at least, the "peace movement" expressed more the Russian than the German desire for peace.

The Stockholm episode reported by Kleist, Stalin's overture to the putative military opponents of Hitler, and the promotion of the imaginary

³⁷ Stalin, "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution," Nov. 6, 1942, in Andrew Rothstein, ed. and tr., *Soviet Foreign Policy during the Patriotic War: Documents and Materials* (London, 1944), 1: 49.

³⁸ Stalin, "Order of the Day of the People's Commissar for Defense," Feb. 23, 1942, in *ibid.*, 37.

³⁹ For example, "Appell an das deutsche Volk, unterzeichnet von 158 deutschen Soldaten," in *Sie kämpften für Deutschland* (Berlin, 1959), 114-21; and similar appeals in *Pravda*, Jan. 30, Mar. 19, 1942.

⁴⁰ Report no. A-12777, Oct. 9, 1943, 45621 C, OSS.

⁴¹ *Beratung der nationalen Friedensbewegung in Deutschland* (Moscow, 1943), 12-39.

⁴² See Horst G. Duhnke, "German Communism in the Nazi Era" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1964), 585-86.

peace front were characteristic products of the peculiar atmosphere created by Stalingrad. They were suggestive of three possible courses that the change of military fortunes opened to the Russians. The first was accommodation with the current Nazi leadership. The second entailed partnership with a conservative German regime dominated by the army. And the third envisaged friendship with a Germany governed by a coalition reminiscent of a popular front but extended to include a wide sampling from the Center and the Right. In due course the Soviet Union was to explore all three of these options.

STALINGRAD INAUGURATED the most intriguing period of Soviet wartime diplomacy. The great battle brought a crushing defeat to Hitler but did not strengthen the solidarity of his enemies. In fact the Russians began almost immediately to put that solidarity to test. They harassed the British personnel attached to the arms convoys, interfering with their navigation and subjecting them to various indignities.⁴³ The official Soviet press was conspicuously deficient in acknowledging American lend-lease deliveries, a deficiency that prompted public criticism by the United States ambassador, William H. Standley, and an angry Russian reaction in return.⁴⁴ Most important, in both his public and his confidential statements Stalin indicated doubts about the suitability of the Allied coalition as a vehicle for his interests.

On February 23, 1943, Stalin's address on the Day of the Red Army did not even mention the Allies.⁴⁵ It presented the war as an exclusively Soviet-German affair. Stalin's words were not calculated to reassure Western military planners, many of whom feared that the Russians would stop fighting once they reached their prewar frontiers. Indeed the sharp curtailment of offensive operations by the Red Army on March 15, 1943, tended to confirm rather than to destroy that disturbing hypothesis.⁴⁶ The unprecedented calm that afterwards prevailed on the battlefields of the eastern front was perhaps justified by the great exertions of the recent months. But the beginning of the calm also coincided to a day with Stalin's "most emphatic warnings" in a reply to Churchill's notification of further obstacles to an early landing in Europe. The message from Moscow referred to "the great danger with which further delay in opening a second front in France

⁴³ S. W. Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-45*, 2 (London, 1950): 400-01; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2: 566.

⁴⁴ William H. Standley and Arthur A. Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia* (Chicago, 1955), 341-42.

⁴⁵ Stalin, "Order of the Day of the Red Army," Feb. 23, 1943, in Rothstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1: 53-57. See also Charles Bohlen, memorandum, Feb. 23, 1943, and Standley to Secretary of State, Feb. 24, 1943, *FRUS, 1943*, 3: *The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East* (Washington, 1963), 506-09.

⁴⁶ See Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, 1968), 118, 128-31.

is fraught."⁴⁷ In his efforts to accelerate the opening of the second front Stalin had issued similar warnings before. But this time the military lull, as well as the intensive peace propaganda on the "German People's Radio," gave his words a special air of urgency. The Soviet Union was demonstrating that its attitude toward Germany was not the same as that of the Western Allies. In particular it was scrupulously avoiding any association with the demand for unconditional surrender that Roosevelt and Churchill had enunciated during their conference at Casablanca in January 1943.⁴⁸

So disconcerting was the behavior of the Russians that at the end of February the British government instructed its ambassador to Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, to inquire on the spot what Soviet intentions with Germany really were. The envoy contacted both Molotov and Stalin, but the "reply was not in very friendly terms."⁴⁹ The Soviet leaders evidently did not wish to prejudice their own course of action. For the moment there were still too many open questions that only time could sort out. But having had more firsthand experience with the power and determination of the enemy than the British and Americans, the Russians definitely entertained fewer illusions about the feasibility of a permanent suppression of Germany.⁵⁰ They preferred an indirect solution to their security problem by seeking a zone of dependent states as protection against any future attack. Poland, not Germany, was therefore the most urgent item on their agenda.

The dramatic deterioration of relations between Moscow and the Polish government in exile during the first four months of 1943 was more of Russian than of Polish making. The Soviet Union took the first decisive steps after reiterating its claims to the disputed borderland. On February 16 the Soviet deputy foreign commissar, Alexander E. Korneichuk, took a strong public stand against the Polish representatives in London because of their unwillingness to grant those claims.⁵¹ And on March 1 the Russians launched the Union of Polish Patriots, an organization that could later serve as the nucleus of a puppet government.

These Soviet actions predictably caused distress in Washington and Lon-

⁴⁷ Churchill to Stalin, Mar. 11, 1943; Stalin to Churchill, Mar. 15, 1943, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., ed. and tr., *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill and Attlee* (New York, 1965), 106, 99-102.

⁴⁸ See Anne Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender* (New Brunswick, 1961), 55-58; and John L. Chase, "Unconditional Surrender Reconsidered," *Political Science Quarterly*, 70 (1955): 258-79.

⁴⁹ Referred to in Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2: 552.

⁵⁰ There is still no satisfactory study about the development of the wartime Soviet policy on Germany. In addition to Duhnke's dissertation on "German Communism in the Nazi Era," the most useful studies are Karl-Heinz Ruffmann, "Das Gewicht Deutschlands in der sowjetischen Aussenpolitik bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (1970), no. 2, pp. 3-18; Alexander Fischer, "Antifaschismus und Demokratie: Zur Deutschlandplanung der UdSSR in den Jahren 1943-1945," in *Potsdam und die deutsche Frage* (Cologne, 1970), 6-33; and Ernst Deuerlein, "Das Problem der 'Behandlung Deutschlands': Umriss eines Schlagwortes des Epochenjahres 1945," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (1965), no. 8, pp. 26-46.

⁵¹ Alexander E. Korneichuk, "Vossoedenie ukrainskogo naroda v nedrach svoego gosudarstva" (Reunion of the Ukrainian People in the Bosom of Its State), *Pravda*, Feb. 20, 1943. See also TASS statement, Mar. 3, 1943, in Rothstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1: 264-65.

don, though not in Berlin. Moscow's insistence upon the frontier that Molotov had fixed with Ribbentrop in 1939 in fact brought back memories to the Germans of their former intimacy with Russia. But so great was the Nazis' intransigence, as well as their lack of subtlety, that they disregarded these friendly allusions. They rather chose to inflict upon the Soviet Union a major irritation. On April 13 they announced the discovery at Katyń of mass graves of murdered Polish officers and accused Moscow of responsibility for the crime. Whatever Goebbels's disposition in favor of an understanding with the Russians, he proved unable to resist this exceptional opportunity to embarrass them.

The genuine dismay and studied indignation displayed by the Soviet government, almost certainly responsible for the massacre, are hardly surprising.⁵² More suggestive are the limits and the direction of Soviet anger. In an initial impulse to gloss over the German indiscretion the official Russian news bulletin hinted at the rather improbable explanation that the Nazis might have mistaken graves for archeological excavations.⁵³ Only when the Germans continued to insist upon their version of what had happened at Katyń did Moscow accuse them, without reservation, of the killings. At the same time, however, the Soviet government tried to divert attention from the merit of the German case in a fashion that could only give additional comfort to the Nazis.⁵⁴ After the Poles had proposed investigation by the International Red Cross, a proposal that Berlin promptly implemented, Moscow added insult to injury by accusing the Poles of collusion with Hitler. Worse still, the Soviet Union on April 26 broke off diplomatic relations with Poland, thus bringing the crisis to a climax.

Stalin's handling of the Katyn affair did not bar a rapprochement with Germany and may have actually served to facilitate it. There are indications of secret approaches at the very time the two belligerents were exchanging public insults. The information available is independent of that from Kleist, who did not happen to be in Stockholm in that particular period. A document in the United States Army Intelligence files mentions a communication in mid-April from Moscow to the French Communists, alerting them to be prepared for possible armistice talks.⁵⁵ And according to Swedish informants of the American Office of Strategic Services, such talks took place shortly thereafter.⁵⁶ In the latter part of April a Swede with connections at the Russian legation was said to have arranged a meeting of

⁵² Janusz K. Zawodny summarizes the evidence in *Death in the Forest* (Notre Dame, 1962), 77-99.

⁵³ Bulletin of the Soviet radio, Apr. 15, 1943, in *Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle dokumentów* (The Katyń Crime in the Light of Documents) (London, 1948), 104.

⁵⁴ "Polskie sotrudniki Gitlera" (Polish Collaborators of Hitler), *Pravda*, Apr. 19, 1943.

⁵⁵ OSS report no. A-5094, May 11, 1943, USSR 3700, G-2. See also "The Problem of a Separate Peace between Germany and Russia," enclosed in A. J. Drexel Biddle to Secretary of State, June 26, 1943, 740.00119 EW/1530, DS.

⁵⁶ OSS report no. A-9469, Aug. 9, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2. See also Polish intelligence report no. 1297, early May 1943, *ibid*.

diplomats at a country estate about thirty kilometers outside of Stockholm. The participants included three unnamed German officials and, from the Soviet side, Mikhail Nikitin, Alexei Taradin, and Boris Yartsev. At one time the respective ministers, Thomsen and Kollontay, were said to have joined the discussions, which lasted for several days but did not lead to an agreement. The Germans were supposedly ready to make peace in return for a satellite Ukraine and for economic concessions in other parts of the Soviet Union, whereas the Russians insisted upon the frontier of 1941.⁵⁷

This intelligence report deserves respect as the most specific contemporary piece of information about the peace feelers. Although there is no way of checking the accuracy of its details, it is quite probable that informal exchanges occurred at Soviet initiative. The pattern of Moscow's policy after Stalingrad supports rather than contradicts this speculation. It was in the spring of 1943, if ever during the war, that the time was ripe for Stalin to explore whether Berlin would be prepared to settle for what his Western allies had been so reluctant to grant him—the confirmation of the Soviet frontier of 1941. But the attitude of the Germans was altogether different from what it had been in August 1939, and they gave no sign of any willingness to restore the frontier they had violated in June 1941.

The Russian participants reportedly broke off the negotiations in Sweden at the beginning of May. In his Order of the Day on May 1 Stalin had publicly assumed a position on the subject of separate peace. He attributed the desire for a separate peace to the Nazis, who “judge their adversaries by their own standards of treachery.”⁵⁸ He also affirmed that only unconditional surrender of the enemy could end the war, although he did not relate this demand to the Casablanca statement by Roosevelt and Churchill. Stalin's strong language suggests that he may have given up any hope of persuading the obstinate Nazis that a compromise was not only in his interest but, needless to say, also in theirs.

But there is another possible interpretation of what Stalin was saying. His statement could have been meant as an encouragement for the renewal of talks on terms more acceptable to him. The triangular nature of the Soviet–Western–German relationship was obvious, and he could alternately show a friendly face to one side or the other. His most convincing argument would have been to demonstrate to the Germans that he could obtain what he wanted from the West. From this point of view, the rather meek reaction of the British and Americans to the Katyn incident gave the impression that Stalin might be able to repair his relations with

⁵⁷ These terms are not mentioned specifically in relation to the April talks, but they recur in intelligence reports from late 1942 to the fall of 1943. See, for example, London SI report, Nov. 3, 1942, USSR 3850, G-2; OSS report no. A-1820, Feb. 5, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2. See also Huene, Lisbon, to German foreign office, Apr. 6, 1943, AA, microfilm 39, frames 33667–68; OSS report no. A-13022-b, Oct. 13, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2; and Kleist, *European Tragedy*, 140.

⁵⁸ Stalin, “Order of the Day of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief,” May 1, 1943, in Rothstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1: 58.

his coalition partners whenever he wanted. They had given proof of an overwhelming desire to maintain at least the appearances of Allied solidarity. And it was the appearance, though not the substance, of this solidarity that the Russians proceeded to promote during the next few weeks.

STALIN'S ADDRESS of May 1, 1943, heralded a conspicuous improvement in official Soviet behavior toward Great Britain and the United States, a difference the more striking since no particular change in the conduct of the Western Allies had prompted it. Alexander Werth, who lived in Moscow as correspondent for the *Sunday Times*, later recalled "the record warmth vis-à-vis Britain and America in May and June 1943."⁵⁹ The official press and radio prominently commemorated the anniversaries of the alliance agreements of 1942 and extolled the Allied operations in North Africa, a battlefield previously denigrated as insignificant.⁶⁰ Russian editorial writers ridiculed the idea of a separate peace and seconded Stalin's call for the unconditional surrender of Germany. And on May 23 the dissolution of the Comintern generated further good feelings in the West.

Yet no practical steps toward closer collaboration accompanied these friendly gestures. In particular, Stalin remained aloof to Roosevelt's urgent pleas for a tripartite summit conference that would clarify mutual war and peace goals.⁶¹ It is difficult to judge to what extent Stalin's aloofness was the result of premeditation rather than of a genuine need to keep a close eye on the developments at the front—the explanation he gave to the president. As Western observers in Moscow noticed, the Russians were at that time especially nervous about the intentions of Germany.⁶² On the one hand, the inexplicable delay of the anticipated and dreaded German summer offensive could mean that Berlin might be contemplating negotiations after all. On the other hand, however, as long as there was no positive evidence of such a readiness, Stalin had to assume that the offensive would eventually come and that he would need whatever relief his allies could give him. Whether to prompt them into action or simply to cheer up the Soviet people, the official press systematically encouraged the belief that now, after the victory in Africa, the second front was imminent.

It is against this background of inflated Russian hopes that the impact of yet another message about a delay of the cross-Channel invasion must be measured. On June 4 Roosevelt and Churchill notified their Soviet

⁵⁹ Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York, 1964), 671-72.

⁶⁰ "Godovshchina sovetsko-angliiskogo soiuznogo dogovora" (The Anniversary of the Soviet-English Treaty of Alliance), *Pravda*, May 26, 1943; "Koalitsiia rozhdeniia voinei i prizvannaia obespechit pobedonosnyi mir" (A Coalition Born of War and Destined to Secure a Victorious Peace), *Voina i rabochii klass*, June 15, 1943, pp. 3-9.

⁶¹ Roosevelt to Stalin, May 5, 1943; Stalin to Roosevelt, May 26, 1943, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., ed. and tr., *Stalin's Correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman* (New York, 1965), 63-64, 66.

⁶² Werth, *Russia at War*, 674-76.

colleague that the operation could not take place before May 1944.⁶³ Stalin's fury at this new apparent procrastination at a time so critical for him is easy to imagine and justify. But as during the Katyń crisis, his reaction was reasoned rather than impulsive. He waited for a whole week, undoubtedly weighing alternative responses and considering their probable effect. In the end he expressed his intense displeasure not only in a secret message but also through an important public gesture. He recalled almost simultaneously the reputedly pro-Western ambassadors Ivan M. Maisky and Maxim Litvinov from their respective posts in London and Washington.

By mid-June, then, the brief period of Moscow's official amity with the West was over. There is no doubt that the Roosevelt-Churchill action—or rather inaction—about the second front had preconditioned the new crisis, but it was Stalin's public behavior that actually created it. He could hardly have failed to take into account the delight that evidence of Allied discord would inevitably produce in Berlin, and he may have aimed at that very effect. In any case, he again set the stage for a rapprochement with Germany, and there are indications of Russian attempts to promote it in the second half of June. On June 16 the Swedish newspaper *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* announced in a special edition that high Soviet and German officials had been negotiating near Stockholm.⁶⁴ An American intelligence report identified them as Mikhail Nikitin of the Russian legation and Paul Schmidt of the press and information section of the German foreign office, and the seaside resort of Saltsjöbaden was cited as their meeting place.⁶⁵ The British government, too, received information from the Swedish capital that Schmidt had met with two members of the Soviet legation in a private house and that Yartsev played the key role in the contact.⁶⁶ According to Kleist's somewhat different account, A. M. Alexandrov, formerly counselor at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin and head of the foreign commissariat's European division, arrived in Stockholm en route to London and tried to contact him through Clauss.⁶⁷ The German minister, Thomsen, also heard that the Russian diplomat was in town and that he wanted "to meet with a gentleman from the German foreign service with whom he was acquainted."⁶⁸

⁶³ Roosevelt to Stalin, received June 4, 1943; Stalin to Roosevelt, June 11, 1943, *Stalin's Correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman*, 67–71.

⁶⁴ Reported in *New York Times*, June 17, 1943. A slightly different version appeared in the Geneva newspaper *La Suisse* on Oct. 2, 1943.

⁶⁵ OSS report no. A-9647, Aug. 9, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2; Herschel Johnson, Stockholm, to Secretary of State, June 17, 1943, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ George Wiskeman to Christopher Warner, British Foreign Office, Aug. 11, 23, 1943, N 4898/66/38, FO 371/36956.

⁶⁷ Kleist, *European Tragedy*, 144–50.

⁶⁸ Thomsen, Stockholm, to German foreign office, June 21, 1943, AA, microfilm 191, frames 144408–09. Basil H. Liddell-Hart, the noted British military historian who had interrogated captured German officers, claimed in his posthumously published book that negotiators, including even Ribbentrop and Molotov, had met behind the German lines near Kirovograd in June 1943. *History of the Second World War* (New York, 1970), 488. Because of the complete lack of supporting evidence, however, this allegation deserves little credence.

After the war this incident received a retrospective publicity in the American press. In July 1947 an article in the New York magazine *Liberty* added further sensational details, which the authors claimed they had acquired during "clandestine conferences with Europeans whose lives depend on anonymity."⁶⁹ It is interesting that the Soviet government considered this rather shabby piece of writing worthy of a prompt response. No one less authoritative than Kollontay herself was commissioned to refute the allegations. In a column printed in *Izvestiia* she concentrated upon a single flaw in the *Liberty* article: Alexandrov could not possibly have been in Stockholm at the critical time because he was serving with the Soviet legation in Australia.⁷⁰ But the Russian sensitivity about the subject enhances rather than reduces the possibility that Alexandrov's colleagues from the foreign commissariat had indeed tried to extend feelers in Stockholm, even though an early indiscretion apparently prevented actual contacts. Such a speculation would also explain why both the Soviet and the German governments had denied the original Swedish newspaper story so vehemently in press communiqués issued on the same day, June 18, 1943.⁷¹

But even after the embarrassment in June Moscow did not abstain from publicizing ideas suggestive of a preference for compromise over struggle to the bitter end. On June 22, 1943, the official information agency Sovinformburo commented ambiguously that "without a second front victory over Germany is impossible."⁷² On July 1 an authoritative article in the ideological journal *Voina i rabochii klass* castigated Western projects for the postwar punishment of the Germans.⁷³ Its author, identified as N. Malinin, derided the theory about the collective guilt of the German people and expressed misgivings about subjecting them to reparations or even to a military occupation. Of all Soviet wartime statements this article went the farthest in hinting that the Germans might be allowed to keep some of their conquests. Questioning not only Polish but also Czechoslovak aspirations for territories that were currently part of the Reich, the author implied that even the return of the Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia was not imperative. Exactly to whom Moscow intended to address these extraordinary allurements is not altogether clear. Stalin may still have hoped that the Nazis could be persuaded to negotiate, but if he did, the advent of the German offensive on July 5 all but destroyed any such hopes. It is more likely that the article foreshadowed a change of policy that had been under preparation ever since the demise of the Comintern and for which

⁶⁹ Paul Schwarz and Guy Richards, "A Secret Russian Mission That Almost Changed History," *Liberty*, July 5, 1947, p. 26. See also similar articles by Donald B. Sanders [pseud.], "Stalin Plotted a Separate Peace," *American Mercury*, Nov. 1947, pp. 519-27; and Robert M. W. Kempner, "Stalin's 'Separate Peace' in 1943," *United Nations World*, 4 (1950): no. 3, pp. 7-9.

⁷⁰ *Izvestiia*, July 29, 1947.

⁷¹ TASS statement, June 18, 1943, in Rothstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1: 269; New York *Times*, June 18, 1943.

⁷² "Dva goda Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo soiuz" (Two Years of the Patriotic War of the Soviet Union), *Pravda*, June 22, 1943.

⁷³ N. Malinin, "O tseliakh voiny" (Concerning the War Aims), *Voina i rabochii klass*, July 1, 1943, pp. 11-15.

the enemy attack provided the appropriate moment.⁷⁴ The formation of the Free Germany Committee on July 12 marked the beginning of the new Soviet strategy.⁷⁵

Retrospective interpretations have tended to obscure the original meaning of this remarkable enterprise. Both friendly and hostile commentators have been inclined to regard the formation of the Free Germany Committee as the first step on the path that ended with the establishment of the German Communist satellite state in 1949.⁷⁶ But evidence that the Russians anticipated this outcome in 1943 is yet to be presented. Most contemporaries understood Russian sponsorship of the committee as a bid for partnership with German conservatives, and the Soviet Union did nothing to discourage this interpretation.⁷⁷ Although Communist émigrés predictably dominated the committee, its striking feature was the participation of the more moderate patriotic members who had been recruited from among the prisoners of war. Their radio appeals, urging the German army to end the war by overthrowing Hitler and withdrawing to the present frontier of the Reich, implied that this relatively modest concession would make possible a fair peace. Whether or not the Russians would have honored this implicit promise is impossible to judge. Yet by having given their blessing to the Free Germany movement they created an obstacle to a rapprochement with Hitler; they invited an understanding instead with his potential successors.

THE SOVIET VICTORY in the battle of Kursk, which ended on July 16, represents in many ways a watershed more important than Stalingrad in the history of the war. The first summertime triumph of Russian arms, it opened the perspective of their continuous and irreversible, though still far from easy, advance to the west. The Germans saw the handwriting on the wall, and doubts about the wisdom of fighting on extended this time to the highest places. Various Nazi officials, acting on their own, tried to find out about Moscow's possible terms for peace. On August 2-5, 1943, Ribbentrop's assistant Rudolf Likus went to Stockholm in order to gather information.⁷⁸ Two weeks later the German foreign minister sum-

⁷⁴ Communist Party of Germany, Directive of May 27, 1943, referred to in Bruno Löwel, "Die Gründung des NKFD im Lichte der Entwicklung der Strategie und Taktik der KPD," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 5 (1963): 618-19.

⁷⁵ "Manifeste des Nationalkomitees 'Freies Deutschland' an die Wehrmacht und an das deutsche Volk," July 12-13, 1943, in *Sie kämpften für Deutschland*, 146-51. The best history of the committee is Bodo Scheurig, *Free Germany* (Middletown, Conn., 1970).

⁷⁶ Representative samples of the opposing views are Gerhard Rossmann, "Die Entwicklung der Vorstellungen der KPD über den neuen Staat," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 9 (1969): special no., pp. 145-62; and Peter Strassner, *Verräter: Das Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland"—Keimzelle der sogenannten DDR* (Munich, 1960).

⁷⁷ One of the best contemporary assessments is Arnold Wolfers, "Soviet Policy toward Germany," R & A Branch, 66834 R, OSS. For a different view, see the article by German émigré Egon Kötting [Eugen Westphal], "Nationalbolsjevism—Tysklands Framtid?" (National Bolshevism as Germany's Future?), *Svensk Tidskrift*, 30 (1943): 496-505.

⁷⁸ Rudolf Likus, note, Aug. 9, 1943, records of the German foreign office, AA, microfilm 162, frames 130779-80. See also Walter Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth* (New York, 1956), 370.

moned Kleist and instructed him to restore contact with Clauss.⁷⁹ In September Goebbels told Hitler that "we must come to an arrangement with one side or the other," and the Führer replied that "he would prefer negotiations with Stalin," although Hitler did not "believe they would be successful."⁸⁰

All these half-hearted peace stirrings on the Nazi side ended in the planning stage. They sufficed, however, to cause grave concern among the men around Karl Goerdeler who hoped to extricate Germany from the war by getting rid of Hitler. One of the conspirators, Ulrich von Hassell, noted in his diary on August 15, 1943:

If Hitler comes to terms with Stalin, the resultant disaster cannot be imagined. It would be different with a decent, self-respecting Germany. This Germany would have to exploit all opportunities. There is only one expedient left—to make either Russia or the Anglo-Americans understand their interest in a sound Germany.⁸¹

Hassell, like most of his friends, would have preferred settlement with the Western powers if only they would modify their stiff demand for unconditional surrender. But at least a few members of the conspiracy favored approaches to the Soviet Union, perhaps because they hoped to find it more responsive or because they considered communism the wave of the future. In the late summer of 1943 Friedrich von der Schulenburg, the former ambassador to Russia, contemplated a secret mission to Moscow by breaking through the front lines.⁸² There is also evidence, however inconclusive, that communist sympathies may have motivated the would-be assassin of Hitler, Claus von Stauffenberg.⁸³

Did the Russians know about the plot against Hitler and attune their policies to the possibility of its success? From what is known about their intelligence network, it seems that until 1942 they had been informed quite accurately about what was happening in Germany. Their main source of information had been the famous espionage organization known as the Red Orchestra.⁸⁴ Although the standard East German book about the Red Orchestra claims that its members knew of the activities of Goerdeler's followers, it offers no specific evidence in support of this claim.⁸⁵ In

⁷⁹ Kleist, *European Tragedy*, 154–56.

⁸⁰ Goebbels, diary entry for Sept. 23, 1943, *The Goebbels Diaries*, tr. L. P. Lochner (Garden City, 1948), 477.

⁸¹ Hassell, diary entry for Aug. 15, 1943, *The Von Hassell Diaries*, tr. H. Gibson (Garden City, 1947), 315.

⁸² Ernst Kaltenbrunner to Martin Bormann, Aug. 28, 1944, in Kaltenbrunner, *Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung* (Stuttgart, 1961), 308–09. See also Hassell, diary entry for Dec. 5, 1943, *Von Hassell Diaries*, 327.

⁸³ See Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End* (Boston, 1947), 486; and Joachim Kramarz, *Claus Graf Stauffenberg* (Frankfurt, 1965), 175–77, 192–93. See also Hans Dress, "Fortschrittliche und reaktionäre Tendenzen in den Reformplänen des Kreisauer Kreises," in *Kommission der Historiker der DDR und UdSSR*, ed., *Der deutsche Imperialismus und der zweite Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1961), 4: 587–606.

⁸⁴ The best book on the subject is Heinz Höhne, *Codeword DIREKTOR: The Story of the Red Orchestra* (New York, 1972).

⁸⁵ Karl-Heinz Biernat and Luise Kraushaar, *Die Schulze-Boysen/Harnack-Organisation im antifaschistischen Kampf* (Berlin, 1970), 28.

any case the Gestapo had destroyed that principal Soviet source of information by the fall of 1942.⁸⁶ In the trial in April 1944 of William Knöchel, a high-ranking German Communist whom Moscow had sent to Germany in January 1942 in order to organize the party underground, the Nazi court noted that before Knöchel's capture later in 1942 he had sent abroad important information about opposition currents in the country.⁸⁷ But this information must have been rather unsubstantial since the knowledge of it did not enable the Gestapo to track down the conspiracy.

As for 1943, Russian and East German literature, which normally plays up rather than down all types of clandestine pro-Soviet activities, has recorded only one instance of a line of communication between Berlin and Moscow in existence during that year. The exchanges began in spring, when Soviet confidants in Stockholm established contact, through a Swedish intermediary, with Anton Saefkow, a leading Communist organizer in Berlin. Saefkow is known to have met two associates of Goerdeler in June 1944, and Saefkow was aware of the plot against Hitler's life possibly as early as the end of 1943.⁸⁸ Saefkow may have notified the Russians of the plot, although available sources give the impression that little of substance passed through this Swedish channel.⁸⁹ Surviving participants in the conspiracy have all denied that any links with Moscow ever existed.⁹⁰ It is therefore unlikely that the Soviet anticipation of a revolt in Germany was anything but an intelligent guess, made without the benefit of knowing what was actually under way.

Just how great the Russians thought were the chances of a successful coup against Hitler is difficult to estimate. But its likelihood definitely increased after the Italians had set an example by deposing Mussolini on July 25, 1943. Since the change of government in Italy was accomplished by the ruling clique rather than by the masses, Moscow had a further reason to focus upon fomenting discontent among Germany's upper classes. Shortly after the Italian events the Soviet Union prepared to supplement the Free Germany Committee, on which Walter Ulbricht and his companions loomed perhaps too large, with the more respectable and exclusive League of German Officers. In the meantime the Russian victory at Kursk had convinced so many captured Germans that the war was lost that there was no shortage of those willing to join in this new enterprise.

Wolfgang Leonhard, who worked during the war in the Moscow offices

⁸⁶ David J. Dallin, *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven, 1955), 264-65.

⁸⁷ Arnold Sywottek, *Deutsche Volksdemokratie: Studien zur politischen Konzeption der KPD 1935-1946* (Düsseldorf, 1971), 118, 245.

⁸⁸ Gerhard Rossmann, *Der Kampf der KPD um die Einheit aller Hitlergegner* (Berlin, 1963), 45-47, 195-96, 222, 255; Gertrud Glondajewski and Gerhard Rossmann, "Ein bedeutendes politisches Dokument des illegalen antifaschistischen Kampfes der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 8 (1966): 646-47; Allen W. Dulles, *Germany's Underground* (New York, 1947), 173-74.

⁸⁹ See Rossmann, *Der Kampf der KPD*, 45-47; and Otto Winzer, *Zwölf Jahre Kampf gegen Faschismus und Krieg* (Düsseldorf, 1955), 231.

⁹⁰ See Bodo Scheurig, ed., *Verrat hinter Stacheldraht?* (Munich, 1965), 232-35.

of the journal *Freies Deutschland*, later reported that the inauguration of the League of German Officers, set for September 1, had been unexpectedly postponed without a substitute date.⁹¹ A few days later the journal was about to publish a startling editorial entitled "Armistice—the Demand of the Day." According to Leonhard this editorial, which omitted the customary anti-Nazi verbiage, was addressed to the men currently in power in Berlin rather than to their prospective challengers. It was withheld from publication only at the last moment, and the delayed proclamation of the league followed on September 11.⁹²

Leonhard's assertion seems to corroborate Kleist's testimony that on September 8 the Russians again attempted to establish contacts in Sweden through Clauss.⁹³ The intermediary alerted Kleist that Vladimir Dekanov, the former Soviet ambassador to Berlin and another of Beria's protégés, was going to visit Stockholm and was eager to meet a German negotiator. According to Clauss, Moscow merely awaited a signal from Berlin and was deeply disappointed when none came.

The coincidence of Leonhard's and Kleist's allegations is well enough known and has led to the belief that Stalin may have made a major bid for peace in September rather than in April or June 1943.⁹⁴ Such a conclusion is possible but not probable; for aside from the evidence previously presented of Nazi unresponsiveness, Kursk had bolstered the self-confidence of the Russians sufficiently to reduce for them the value of any deal with Hitler. The hypothesis also depends much too heavily on the veracity of the disreputable Clauss, who very likely misled both the German and the Soviet diplomats about the actual extent of his intimacy with each of them.

A more probable explanation of what happened during those first few days of September is that the presence of Ribbentrop's emissary in Stockholm, along with Clauss's grandiloquence, almost convinced the Russians that Berlin had unexpectedly changed its mind about negotiating. Then the article in *Freies Deutschland* would have been a tentative sign of their interest. But the hoax was exposed just in time to spare the Russians the same embarrassment they had experienced in June, when the Swedish newspaper had leaked similar shady dealings. If this was the case, then the Soviet government, though no longer itself trying to extend peace feelers to the present German regime, was in early September 1943 still willing to respond to initiatives by others.

Soon, however, even that willingness disappeared, and the experience with Clauss may have been the last blow. On September 13 Molotov re-

⁹¹ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago, 1958), 318–20.

⁹² Scheurig, *Free Germany*, 65. See also Heinrich von Einsiedel, *I Joined the Russians* (New Haven, 1953), 98–106.

⁹³ Kleist, *European Tragedy*, 164–71.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Minuth, "Sowjetisch-deutsche Friedenskontakte," 38–45; and Lionel Kochan, *The Struggle for Germany* (New York, 1967), 96.

jected a mediation offer by the Japanese ambassador, Naotake Sato, intimating to him that whatever chances there had been of an understanding between Germany and Russia no longer existed. Molotov is quoted as having said: "Under different circumstances, the Soviet government would have considered it its duty to accept the Japanese offer of mediation."⁹⁵

The rules of the diplomatic triangle now required that Stalin should attempt to improve his relations with the British and the Americans. And indeed, from September onwards, he acted to instill more life into the alliance—not only in words but also in deeds. The decisive date was September 8, when, after months of dilatory excuses, he finally consented to a conference with Roosevelt and Churchill and accepted the date they had proposed.⁹⁶ A week later Stalin proved that he cared more about winning their confidence than about keeping open any secret channels to the enemy: Andrei Gromyko, chargé d'affaires in Washington, duly reported the Japanese mediation offer to the secretary of state, Cordell Hull.⁹⁷ Equally significant, Konstantin Vinogradov of the Soviet legation in Stockholm revealed to an American colleague that "German agents and intermediaries" had recently approached Russian diplomats there—a disclosure in striking contrast to his consistent denials of such approaches in the past.⁹⁸

By the fall of 1943 evidence had mounted that a peace with Hitler was impossible and his replacement by more reasonable men improbable. The Russians nevertheless abstained from endorsing the formula for unconditional surrender until after the Normandy landings in June 1944.⁹⁹ As long as the second front was in abeyance they avoided doing anything that would prejudice a separate arrangement with an anti-Nazi regime in case Hitler's enemies would come to power after all. But after September 1943 the Soviet Union no longer went so far as actively to prepare for such an arrangement.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION to be asked is whether Stalin did not himself try to create a false impression of his readiness to conclude a separate peace merely to make his allies more amenable to his demands. After the war many Western authors replied in the affirmative. General Albert C. Wedemeyer, for example, concluded that the Soviet dictator "was simply holding the idea over our heads and blackmailing us to give him more aid."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Quoted in Toshikazu Kase, *Journey to the Missouri* (New Haven, 1950), 162–63.

⁹⁶ Stalin to Roosevelt, Sept. 8, 1943, *Stalin's Correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman*, 90–91.

⁹⁷ Gromyko to Hull, Sept. 14, delivered Sept. 16, 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 3: 696–97.

⁹⁸ Johnson, Stockholm, to Secretary of State, Sept. 29, 1943, *ibid.*, 698–99.

⁹⁹ After the Russian delegates had used delaying tactics in the European Advisory Commission for six months, they approved its draft instrument for German surrender on July 25, 1944. *FRUS*, 1944, 1: *General* (Washington, 1966), 252–54. The chief Soviet representative, Fedor Gusev, announced the confirmation of the document by his government on August 21, 1944. John G. Winant to Secretary of State, Aug. 21, 1944, *ibid.*, 276.

¹⁰⁰ Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (New York, 1958), 92.

To attribute to the Russians a genuine desire for compromise with anyone would not have been compatible with the belief in their insatiable hunger for power, a belief prevalent during the cold war.

But Stalin's aptitude at deception notwithstanding, his alleged scheme to frighten his coalition partners cannot be reconciled with the evidence. Peace rumors emanated from so many different sources, independent of one another, that they could not have possibly been disseminated from one center.¹⁰¹ In addition Stalin had strong enough reasons to refrain from mystification: planting false reports about secret dealings with the enemy could only increase the chances that the Western capitalists and their German colleagues might turn the tables on him. Accordingly the Russians coped with the many circulating rumors in a fashion calculated to discourage speculation rather than to encourage it. They ignored those rumors that were too vague or too fantastic to be taken seriously and reacted only to the ones with substance: the three abortive feelers in Stockholm and the Japanese mediation attempts were the incidents that prompted official refutations.¹⁰² Thus the Soviet government tried to divert attention from what had happened rather than attract it to what had not. Those contemporaries who thought that rumors were being deliberately planted suspected a German scheme much more often than a Russian one.¹⁰³ But the Nazis, though no doubt eager to sow mistrust among their adversaries, were also apprehensive that such a maneuver might backfire against their own national morale. They therefore frequently denied that any peace efforts were under way, using for that purpose the foreign service of the German radio rather than the domestic news media.¹⁰⁴

Rumors of peace feelers proliferated throughout the summer and fall of 1943 despite Russian and German efforts to suppress them. They were especially rife in Latin America, where amateurs and imposters, within and without the diplomatic corps, disseminated the most sensational stories. On September 28, 1943, for example, the newspapers in Arequipa, Peru's second largest city, announced that an armistice between Germany and Russia had just been signed.¹⁰⁵ In Switzerland there was much talk about mediation by the Vatican.¹⁰⁶ And various Eastern European sources re-

¹⁰¹ See memorandum by Harvey H. Smith, Chief of G-2 Central European Branch, Sept. 20, 1943, Germany 6900, G-2.

¹⁰² See nn. 58, 71, 97, 98; and TASS statement, July 17, 1943, in Rothstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1: 269. A Japanese mediation attempt in June 1943 is mentioned in Ivan Krylov [pseud.], *Soviet Staff Officer* (London, 1951), 241-42.

¹⁰³ Navy intelligence report, no. 660-43, Sept. 26, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2; information series no. 103A, Nov. 15, 1943, Germany 6900, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ Broadcasting monitoring report, Aug. 21, 1943, USSR 6900, G-2; press survey, "More Rumors on a Russo-German Peace," Oct. 8, 1943, *ibid*.; broadcast summary, Oct. 15, 1943, Germany 6900, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ Navy intelligence report, Oct. 15, 1943, Germany 6900, G-2. At the end of September a rumor circulated in Rome that a Soviet-German armistice would be signed on October 15. British Embassy, Bern, to British Foreign Office, Oct. 1, 1943, C 11735/55/18, FO 371/34438.

¹⁰⁶ Leland Harrison, Bern, to Secretary of State, Oct. 11, 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 3: 708-09; press survey, Nov. 1943, USSR 6900, G-2. See also Bergen, Vatican, to German foreign office, May 4, 1943, AA, microfilm 39, frame 33750.

ported alleged discussions between German and Russian agents in Sofia.¹⁰⁷ No evidence has been found to substantiate any of these reports.

Paradoxically the peace scare reached its climax when the time for a Stalin-Hitler rapprochement had already passed. In August 1943, two months after the second Stockholm episode, Robert E. Sherwood reported that the atmosphere was "alarmingly reminiscent of that which preceded the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939."¹⁰⁸ Although the Foreign Office in London received fewer reports about peace feelers in 1943 than they had in 1942, and although they discounted them as unfounded,¹⁰⁹ government officials in Washington were worried. They anxiously discussed memorandums such as "The Proper Course of Action for the United States in the Event Russia and Germany Effect a Compromise Peace."¹¹⁰ In October Roosevelt's chief adviser, Harry Hopkins, publicly admitted that possibility and proceeded to reassure the American people. He wrote in the *American Magazine*: "Russia, the keystone of the war, is still fighting grimly. If we lose her, I do not believe for a moment that we will lose the war, but I would change my prediction about the time of victory."¹¹¹

The presupposition that the Soviet Union had been so weakened by the war that it might seek peace because of the high price of victory was somewhat incongruously blended with the belief that her "postwar position in Europe will be a dominant one" and that "every effort must be made to obtain her friendship."¹¹² The two contradictory assumptions helped to shape the Western conviction about the necessity of concessions with respect to a postwar Russian sphere of influence in Europe. Such was the situation on the eve of the critical conferences scheduled to meet in late 1943: the conference at Moscow of foreign ministers in October and the meeting at Teheran of the Big Three a month later.

Their recent military successes notwithstanding, the Russians approached the Moscow conference from a position of weakness rather than of strength. They placed on the agenda only one item, and this item was suggestive of their uppermost priority: how to hasten the end of the war—by launching the Second Front and by other means.¹¹³ Regarding political questions, they had originally wanted the meeting to be "only of

¹⁰⁷ New York Times, Oct. 23, 1943; Laukhuff memorandum on conversation at the State Department with Father Odo, Oct. 19, 1943, 740.00119 EW/1934 DS; Wellington, memorandum on conversation at the State Department with Father Odo, Nov. 18, 1943, 740.0011 EW/32140, DS; report no. A-15077, Nov. 16, 1943, OSS.

¹⁰⁸ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York, 1948), 734.

¹⁰⁹ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2: 560.

¹¹⁰ Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington, 1959), 286-87.

¹¹¹ Harry Hopkins, "We Can Win in 1945," *American Magazine*, Oct. 1943, p. 100.

¹¹² "Russia's Position," Aug. 2, 1943, *FRUS: The Conferences at Washington and Quebec, 1943* (Washington, 1970), 625.

¹¹³ "The Consideration of Measures to Shorten the Duration of the War against Hitlerite Germany and Her Allies in Europe," Oct. 19, 1943, *FRUS, 1943, 1: General* (Washington, 1963), 771-72.

preparatory character."¹¹⁴ But the Soviet delegation did not object to discussing such questions once they were introduced by the British and American representatives. The record of the proceedings shows that the Western delegates were at times more accommodating than the Russian delegates had apparently expected. For example, Molotov was surprised by Eden when he withdrew without debate his previous objections to the planned Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty, which would set a precedent for a client relationship between Moscow and the small nations of East Central Europe.¹¹⁵ Similarly Secretary of State Hull tried to meet the Russian concern for security with such radical proposals about the suppression of Germany that the foreign commissar was caught unprepared.¹¹⁶ The Western powers tried to convince Stalin that their friendship promised greater advantages than anything Berlin possibly had to offer. The Russian leader seemed convinced when, on the last day of the conference he walked up to Hull to deny "in the most sarcastic terms . . . reports . . . that the Soviet Union and Germany might agree on peace terms."¹¹⁷ And before the heads of state met at Teheran four weeks later Stalin made another important gesture to reassure his allies.

On November 12 Molotov handed to the United States ambassador, W. Averell Harriman, a memorandum that, along with the earlier hint by Vinogradov, is the only available document of Soviet origin that directly concerns the happenings in Stockholm.¹¹⁸ The foreign commissar stated that German agents had recently attempted to establish contact but had been immediately turned away. He mentioned Clauss and Kleist by name—an authoritative confirmation of their roles as intermediaries that bestows a measure of authenticity on Kleist's memoirs. The only discrepancy is in dates: Kleist, as well as Vinogradov, referred to early September, Molotov to mid-October. The different dating may have been necessitated by Kollontay's statement for *Daily Express* on October 3, in which she said, "There have never been any such feelers put by the Germans to my Legation."¹¹⁹ Too long an interval between the event and its disclosure could also have inspired undesirable queries about the motives for the delay.

As was obviously intended, the message promoted Western trust in the Soviet ally. Though belated and originally unexpected, this was in the last analysis Moscow's most important gain from its peace overtures earlier that year. Illustrative of the extent of the trust was the consent of the United States delegation at Teheran to being housed on the premises of the Soviet Embassy, which was undoubtedly well equipped with listening

¹¹⁴ Arkadi Sobolev to Eden, Sept. 29, 1943, annex C to memorandum no. 434, CAB 66/41.

¹¹⁵ Summary of proceedings, session of Oct. 24, 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 1: 624-27.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of meeting, Oct. 25, 1943, *ibid.*, 632; see also 720-23.

¹¹⁷ Hull, memorandum, Oct. 30, 1943, *ibid.*, 687.

¹¹⁸ Molotov to Harriman, Nov. 12, 1943, *ibid.*, 502-03.

¹¹⁹ "Interview between Mr. Gordon Young and Mme Kollontay," Press Reading Bureau, Stockholm, to Political Intelligence Department, London, Oct. 7, 1943, N 5967/499/38, FO 371/36992.

devices.¹²⁰ Since there is no evidence that the guests took this special feature of their quarters into account, Stalin was thus given the unique opportunity to eavesdrop on their most intimate conversations.

At the Teheran conference Stalin appeared to be finally satisfied with his allies after they had demonstrated a willingness to meet him more than half way. They gave him a clear impression—clearer, again, than he had probably anticipated—that they would not obstruct his freedom of action in Eastern Europe. Concerning the all-important question of Poland, Roosevelt himself sought out the dictator to offer assurance that “personally he agreed with the views of Marshal Stalin” although Roosevelt “could not participate in any decision” because of concern for the Polish-American vote.¹²¹

The American and British statesmen hoped to win Russia’s cooperation by satisfying what they perceived as its reasonable aspirations. But in the absence of clear understandings about what exactly was reasonable, their efforts tended to stimulate Russian aspirations rather than to restrain them. If earlier in 1943 the Soviet Union had signaled to the Germans that it would have been contented with return to the status quo as it had obtained in 1941, there were no longer any such indications at Teheran. On the contrary, Stalin hinted that his goals would expand with expanding opportunities: “There is no need to speak at the present time about any Soviet desires, but when the time comes we will speak.”¹²² At least one Western participant in the conference, Charles Bohlen, was convinced that those aspirations now extended even beyond the historic area of Russian interest. In what remains one of the best contemporary estimates of Stalin’s intent, Bohlen concluded that the Soviet Union wanted to become “the only important military and political force on the continent of Europe” by reducing the rest of it “to military and political impotence.”¹²³

The roots of the developments that later culminated in the cold war should be sought in 1943 rather than in any other period in the history of the Great Alliance. With the cold war in mind, the significance of the separate peace prospects during that critical year is twofold. First, Stalin’s inability to obtain a relatively modest territorial settlement from Germany led him to augment his goals while he continued fighting the war. Second, the British and Americans, disturbed about his leanings toward a negotiated peace, became inclined to tolerate more ambitious Soviet goals. Their attitude encouraged Stalin to test the limits of their tolerance later on. And it was his overestimation of those limits that eventually made conflict inevitable.

¹²⁰ The President’s Log, *FRUS: The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran, 1943* (Washington, 1961), 461–64.

¹²¹ Minutes of Roosevelt-Stalin meeting, Dec. 1, 1943, *ibid.*, 594.

¹²² Minutes of meeting, Nov. 29, 1943, *ibid.*, 555.

¹²³ Bohlen, memorandum, Dec. 15, 1943, *ibid.*, 846.